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ABSTRACT

In formulating a practical guide for evaluators of social studies courseware, the fundamental elements of the "Evaluator's Guide to Microcomputer-Based Instructional Packages," (MicroSIFT, 1982) were combined with an abbreviated version of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) adopted curriculum-specific guidelines. The categories used in evaluating courseware include: (1) general quality of content; (2) general instructional quality; (3) general technical quality; (4) social studies knowledge; (5) social studies skill development; and (6) values in social studies. Specific criteria are delineated for each of six categories that teachers need to address in evaluating the courseware. In establishing a rating for a particular evaluative category, instructors should: (1) evaluate the total package; (2) apply the specific criteria within the category to the package; and (3) assign a rating to the category. A sample review outline is provided. (SM)

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GUIDE FOR EVALUATORS
OF SOCIAL STUDIES COURSEWARE

Prepared by

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COURSEWARE RATING SYSTEM

	Rating 5 = excellent 4 = very good 3 = good 2 = fair 1 = poor
General Quality of Content	
General Instructional Quality	
General Technical Quality	
Social Studies Knowledge	
Social Studies Skill Development	
Values in Social Studies	
Total rating	_____ out of _____ or _____ %

EXPLANATION OF COURSEWARE RATING SYSTEM

It was the view of the developers of the "Social Studies Microcomputer Courseware Evaluation Guidelines" that the criteria established by the ad hoc committee be applied in concert with more general evaluative criteria established by others and widely available. In formulating a practical guide for evaluators of social studies courseware, we have combined the fundamental elements of one such general evaluation instrument (Evaluator's Guide to Microcomputer-Based Instructional Packages, MicroSIFT, 1982) with an abbreviated version of the NCSS-adopted curriculum-specific guidelines. The former are represented in the first three evaluative categories, while the latter apply to the second three categories.

While key questions are provided for each of the six categories in the rating system, evaluators are advised to refer to the original publications for a more complete discussion of individual criteria. References to particular MicroSIFT **(MS)** and National Council for the Social Studies **(NCSS)** criteria will be noted.

General Quality of Content

1. Is the content accurate? (MS-1; NCSS-1.02)
2. Does the content have educational value? (MS-2)
3. Is the content free of race, ethnic, sex and other stereotypes? (MS-3, NCSS-1.05)

General Instructional Quality

1. Is the purpose of the courseware well-defined? (MS-4)
2. Does the courseware achieve its defined purpose? (MS-5)
3. Is the presentation of content clear and logical? (MS-6)

4. Is the level of difficulty appropriate for the target audience? (MS-7)
5. Are graphics/color/sound used for appropriate instructional reasons? (MS-8)
6. Is use of the courseware motivational? (MS-9)
7. Does the courseware effectively stimulate student creativity? (MS-10) Does it encourage divergent thinking? (NCSS-2.04)
8. Is feedback on student responses effectively employed? (MS-11)
9. Can the learner control the rate and sequence of presentation and review? (MS-12)
10. Is instruction integrated with previous student experience? (MS-13)
11. Is learning generalizable to an appropriate range of situations? (MS-14)

General Technical Quality

1. Are user support materials comprehensive? (MS-15)
2. Are user support materials effective? (MS-16)
3. Are information displays effective? (MS-17)
4. After initial introduction and practice, can intended users easily and independently operate the program?
5. After initial introduction and practice, can intended users easily and independently operate the program?[1]
6. Does the program appropriately use relevant computer capabilities? (MS-20)
7. Is the program reliable in normal use? (MS-21)

Social Studies Knowledge

1. Does the courseware emphasize currently valid social science knowledge? (NCSS-1.01)
2. Is the courseware's content reality-oriented? (NCSS-1.03)
3. Does the courseware underscore the significance of both the past and the present? (NCSS-1.04)
4. Is the content oriented toward issue analysis? (NCSS-1.11)
5. Does the courseware address significant, pervasive, and enduring social issues? (NCSS-1.12)
6. Does the courseware foster the development of a global perspective? (NCSS-1.13)
7. Does the courseware develop knowledge about the development of human society? (NCSS-1.13)

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[1]Since courseware complexity is not necessarily a negative characteristic, students and teachers should expect to expend some initial effort at becoming familiar with the courseware. If, after a reasonable amount of such effort, the courseware is still difficult to use, negative ratings on criteria #4 and #5 are warranted.

8. Does the courseware foster the development of multicultural understanding? (NCSS-1.15)
9. Does the courseware support the personal and social growth of students? (NCSS-1.16)

Social Studies Skill Development

1. Does the courseware support the development and refinement of inquiry and problem-solving skills? (NCSS-2.01)
2. Does the courseware support the development and refinement of critical thinking skills? (NCSS-2.02)
3. Does the courseware engage students in higher cognitive levels of thinking (analysis, synthesis, evaluation)? (NCSS-2.03)
4. Does the courseware effectively support concept formation? (NCSS-2.05)
5. Does the courseware support the development and refinement of decision-making skills? (NCSS-2.11 to 2.17)
6. Does the courseware support the development and refinement of information-processing skills? (NCSS-2.21 to 2.26)
7. Does the courseware support the development and refinement of cooperation and participation skills? (NCSS-2.31 to 2.33)
8. Does the courseware provide meaningful and logical follow-up activities? (NCSS-2.34)

Values in Social Studies

1. Does the courseware help students understand the influence of values on behavior? (NCSS-3.01)
2. Does the courseware help students understand and appreciate the values that underlie substantive beliefs and procedural guarantees expressed in this nation's fundamental documents? (NCSS-3.02)
3. Does the courseware help students to identify their own beliefs, to make choices based on those beliefs, and to understand the consequences of those choices? (NCSS-3.12)
4. Does the courseware encourage conjoint reflection on feelings, behaviors, and beliefs? (NCSS-3.12)
5. Does the courseware support a process of value analysis by which learners can make rational, defensible value judgments? (NCSS-3.13 and 3.14)

PREPARING COURSEWARE EVALUATIONS

In establishing a rating for a particular evaluative category, the following is a reasonable approach. Consider the object of evaluation as the total package: computer program ("software") and all other support materials, print-based or

otherwise. The package as a whole, then, should be judged first by the more specific criteria within a given category. Evaluators may refer to the original sources of criteria for more extended descriptions. These criteria should be viewed as suggestions, and reviewers should not feel constrained either to apply all criteria within that category or to weigh all criteria equally.

Once the specific criteria have been considered, evaluators must then assign a rating to the category (5 to 1) and calculate an overall percentage rating (generally, some value "out of" 30 points). It is possible that none of the criteria in a given category applies to the courseware being evaluated (e.g., "values in social studies"). In such a case, the evaluator should record an **"NA"** in the appropriate box and reduce the total possible points by 5 when figuring a percentage rating.

Having assigned ratings to each of the six evaluative categories, evaluators should prepare a narrative review, following an outline similar to that provided below. Generally, the purpose of the narrative portion of the review is to describe the courseware and its equipment requirements and to explain the ratings it has received.

Sample Review Outline

I. Courseware Specifications

- A. Developer name
- B. Distributor(s) address(es)
- C. Target audience

D. Hardware requirements (including peripherals and recommendations or optional equipment)
E. Cost for individual program, hard disk version (if available), and lab pack (if available)
F. Type of program (drill & practice, tutorial, database, simulation, etc)
G. Support materials included
H. Policies: preview, warranty, backup copy, multiple machine loading

II. Description and Features

III. General Evaluation (corresponds to categories 1-3 of rating system)

A. General quality of content
B. General instructional quality
C. General technical quality

IV. Social Studies Evaluation (corresponds to categories 4-6 of rating system)

A. Social studies knowledge
B. Social studies skill development
C. Values in social studies

V. Concluding or Summative Comments

VI. A Completed Courseware Rating Table

REFERENCES

Rose, Stephen A., Allan R. Brandhorst, Allen D. Glenn, James O. Hodges and Charles S. White. "Social Studies Microcomputer Courseware Evaluation Guidelines," Social Education, 48 (November/December), 1984, 573-576.

MicroSIFT. Evaluator's Guide for Microcomputer-Based Instructional Packages. Eugene, OR: International Council for Computers in Education (ICCE), 1982.